

The miners' strike, 1984. As described in The Economist, 1978.

They saw it coming

In 1978, when the Conservative party was preparing for the general election, *The Economist* annoyed it by publishing its policies for the nationalised industries. This cannot, said most readers, really be what the Conservative party means to do. From our issue of May 27, 1978, read on:

“A copy of the final report of the Conservative party's policy group on the nationalised industries has reached *The Economist*. It has been drafted by the radical right-wing MP Nicholas Ridley and is likely to cause a thundering row...

In an annex to this report, Mr Ridley and some of his co-authors have been pondering how to counter any "political threat" from those they regard as "the enemies of the next Tory government". They believe that in the first or second year after the Tories' election, there might be a major challenge from a trade union either over a wage claim or over redundancies. They fear it may occur in a "vulnerable industry" such as coal, electricity or the docks and have the support of "the full force of communist disrupters". They would like a five-part strategy for countering this threat:

- Return on capital figures should be

rigged so that an above-average wage claim can be paid to the "vulnerable" industries.

- The eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories, in a field they think could be won (railways, British Leyland, the civil service or steel).

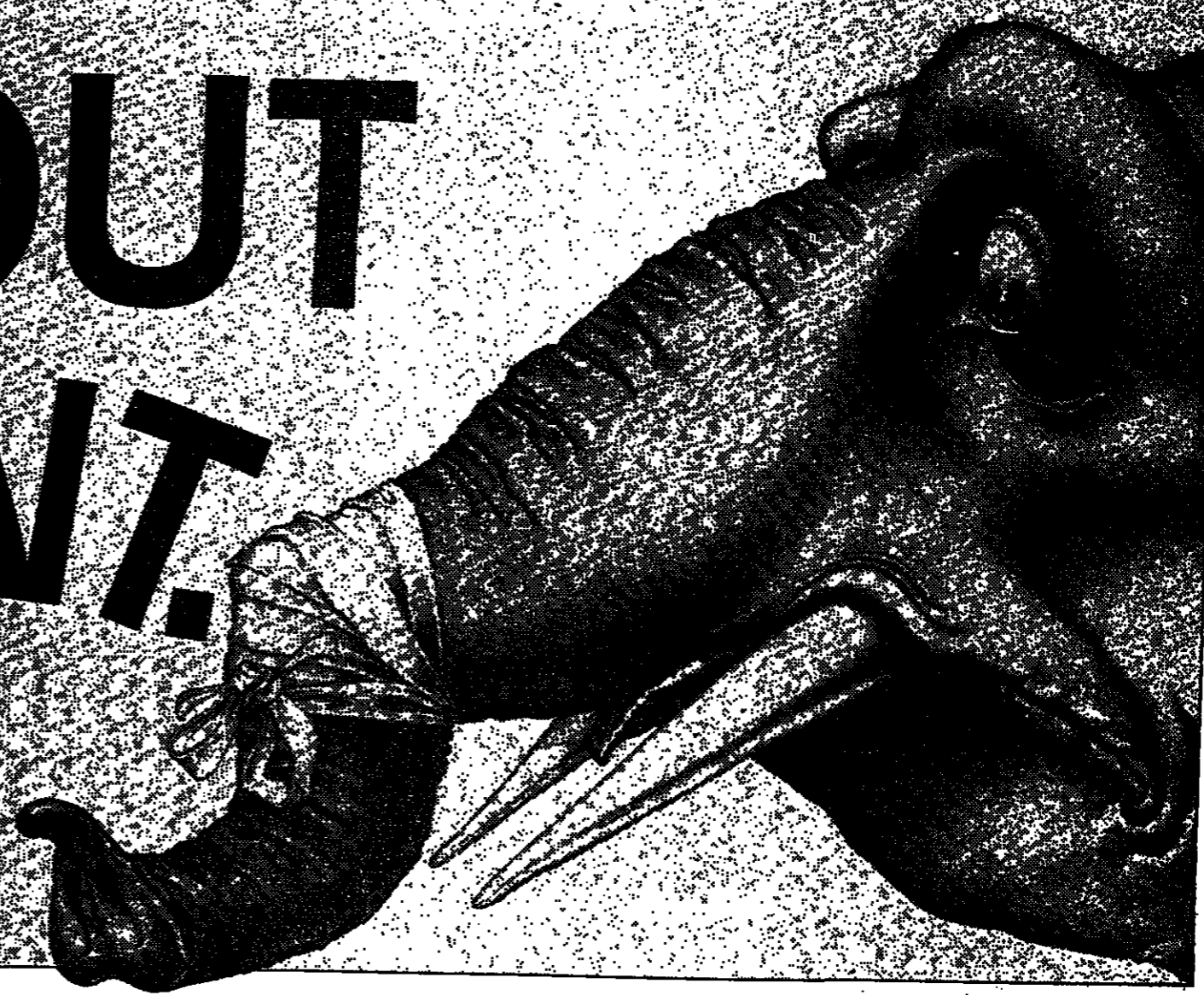
- Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry. They would like a Thatcher government to: (a) build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations; (b) make contingency plans for the import of coal; (c) encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; (d) introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.

- The group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be "to cut off the money supply to the strikers, and make the union finance them".

- There should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing. "Good non-union drivers" should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection.

The
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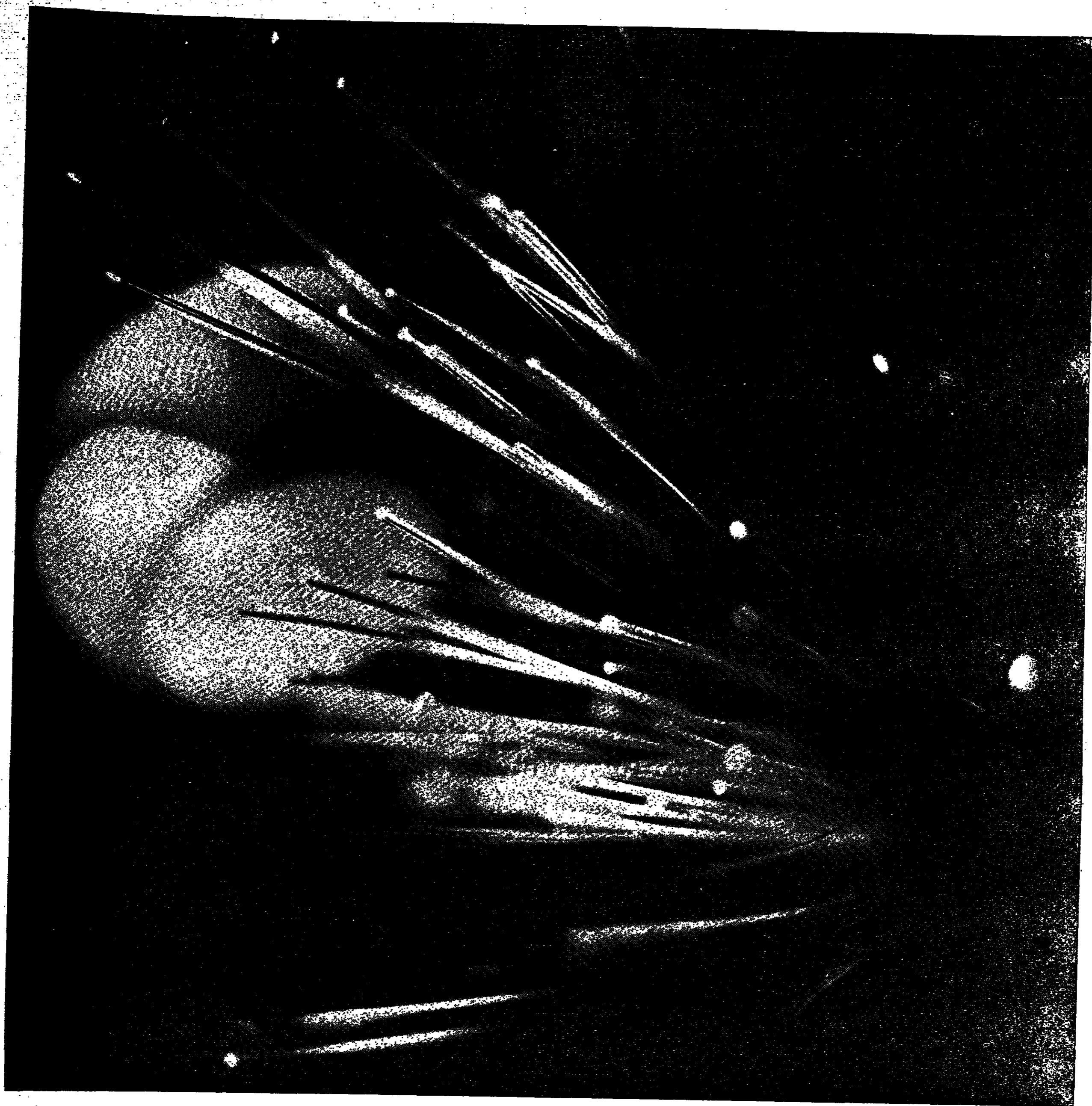


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